Range-wide Status Assessment of *Cirsium longistylum* (long-styled thistle)

Prepared for:

Burnett Land, LLC

By:

Scott Mincemoyer

Montana Natural Heritage Program
Natural Resource Information System
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Executive Summary

Cirsium longistylum Moore & Frankton (long-styled thistle) is a state endemic thistle restricted to areas of central Montana in and around the Little Belts, Big Belts and Castle mountains, generally on sedimentary parent materials. First described as a distinct species in 1963, its overall distribution and abundance remained poorly documented for a couple decades afterwards. It is currently known from a six county area. The majority of the populations occur on National Forest lands managed by the Helena and Lewis and Clark National Forests, though a few populations occur partially or wholly on private lands.

Field surveys were initiated in 2004 to update occurrence and population data for the species. These surveys discovered several new populations, extended the boundaries of several others, failed to relocate a few occurrences and provided updated and more precise population estimates for most of the known occurrences. Additional data and field observations were collected that enabled us to clarify potential threats such as those posed by invasive weeds and an introduced bio-control *Rhinocyllus conicus*.

Population estimates of nearly 30,000 plants, including seven high quality populations, scattered over four mountain ranges are promising for the long-term viability of the species. Long- and short-term population trends are difficult to gauge due to the lack of good survey data over many years. However, available data and observations provide some evidence that population levels have at least remained fairly stable over the past decade, with significant yearly fluctuations possible. Threats posed by invasive weeds and the introduced bio-control provide reason for concern and population monitoring should continue in the future. As a result of this assessment, the Montana Natural Heritage Program ranking of the species will change from the current G2/S2 to G3/S3 (see Appendix A: Global/State Rank Definitions).

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